

## CHAPTER 12

# BASIC PHOTOJOURNALISM

Photojournalism is a form of communication that plays a vital part in modern news reporting. To convey their message, photojournalists use a harmonious combination of photographs and words. Many of the leading magazines and newspapers attribute success to photojournalism. The reason for this is simple — a good photograph can, at a glance, portray the essence of a news or feature story.

Well-composed, action-packed photographs with carefully worded photo captions have reader appeal, realism and permanence. Do you remember the photographs of the raising of the American flag over Mount Suribachi, the signing of Japan's surrender aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* (BB 63) (fig. 12-1), the swearing-in of Lyndon B. Johnson aboard Air Force One or Neil Armstrong and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin

planting Old Glory on the moon? How many of the words written about these events do you remember?

The photojournalist's objective is to communicate primarily through photographs. To be an effective their photojournalist, you must understand the following fundamentals:

- **Know your subject.** You cannot communicate information about a subject of which you have no knowledge.
- **Know why you are communicating.** You should always have a purpose for your message. The purpose might be as simple as sharing an emotion or experience.
- **Know to whom you are communicating.** Is it a specific audience that has some knowledge of your subject, or is it a “mixed bag”?



U.S. Navy photo

**Figure 12-1.—Fleet Adm. Chester W. Nimitz signs the Japanese surrender document aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* (BB 63). Looking on, from left, are Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Adm. William F. Halsey and Rear Adm. Forrest P. Sherman, of Staff for Fleet Adm. Nimitz.**

- **Know how to use the camera.** Your camera is a mechanical device that only sees a limited area and exercises no selection over the action that takes place in front of it. As a photojournalist, you can use this limited view to exclude extraneous subject matter and to focus on your message. You do this by determining which lens, camera angle, lighting method and timing will capture the photograph that will best communicate your story.

This chapter introduces you to photojournalism and covers some of the techniques by which it is applied. Maximum emphasis is placed on achieving good photographic composition, interest, impact and technical quality. Granted, the basic information contained here is not sufficient to qualify you as a Navy photojournalist in the strictest sense. However, if you learn and use this material, you can become a proficient news photographer and an asset to the public information efforts of your command.

## **HISTORY OF MILITARY PHOTOJOURNALISM**

*LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Describe the history of military photojournalism.*

The history and growth of military photojournalism has been brief, but significant. It started when Matthew Brady and his assistants were commissioned to document the Civil War pictorially. Their photographs were made on wet plates that had to be processed immediately, thus limiting mobility. The film they used was of low sensitivity; therefore, action photography was out of the question. Further, there was no means to get the photographs to the publisher quickly, so interest was limited. No processes for reproducing a photograph in a newspaper were known at that time, except by having an artist copy them into line drawings. These problems did not destroy the desire for photographs or the value of photojournalism as it existed then, but rather posed challenges to cause people to search for a better way to use the photographs taken.

By the time of the Spanish-American War (and the equally important Hearst-Pulitzer circulation war), camera equipment had evolved into a smaller, portable form. Film on an unbreakable cellulose base had been invented that could be exposed in one place and processed many miles away and many hours later. Film sensitivity had improved so that action could be photographed. Quicker transportation meant more timely delivery of news photographs to the publisher, while their news value was still high. Methods of photo-

engraving, though still crude, allowed newspapers to print several halftones along with etchings and linecuts.

Military photographers took many photographs during World War I, but the importance of these photographs as an adjunct to the written history of the war was not realized for many years.

The period between the World Wars was very important to photojournalism. "Plaything" photography yielded to more exacting photography as a science. Cameras designed for presswork became available in a price range within the budget of the average newspaper. The sound motion picture, the miniature camera, the fast lens, the flash lamp, flash synchronization, and hundreds of film, emulsion and laboratory innovations were put to use. Most important, the public desired news photographs and editors accepted photography as a tool of journalism.

World War II saw news photography in the military services rise considerably. Early in the war, the services drafted professional photographers and formed teams to document the history of United States international involvement. They went one step further by using their talents to show the horrors of war. They took photographs with stopping power, photographs that had impact and photographs that forced the viewer to look and read the copy.

By the time of the Korean War, photography rose above an improved and exacting science and became a finer skill. Photographers began to document moods and feelings, to look for photographs that expressed what was not readily apparent on the surface and to concentrate on photographs for news releases. It was during this period that the military photojournalist became a professional.

During the Vietnam War years, photography continued its advances in equipment and processes. Along with these advances, photojournalism reached new heights, providing just short of a "you were there" atmosphere of the war. Today, the military photojournalist is a mainstay of the military establishment — a vital contributor to the internal and external public affairs efforts of a command.

## **PHOTOGRAPHIC COVERAGE ELEMENTS**

*LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the elements of photographic coverage.*

Photographic coverage is invaluable in most publications. Through effective layout, photographs can be used independently as lead stories with merely a cutline accompanying them. In other uses, photographs



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**Figure 12-2.—News photograph with action and impact.**

can support headlines and written spot news accounts as well as feature stories.

The photograph serves as a definition for words. No two people imagine identical photographs through words alone. Groups of words rarely cause similar mental images in everyone. Different people see different photographs in their mental interpretations of verbal descriptions of a given scene. From a photograph, everyone gets the same mental picture.

## **TYPES OF NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS**

What is a news photograph? Just about everything said about recognizing and gathering news also can be applied to the news photograph. News photographs also have common news elements. These same 10 elements — immediacy, proximity, consequence, prominence, suspense, oddity, conflict, sex, emotion and progress — are essential to successful photojournalism. You can judge the newsworthiness of a photograph by the degree to which these elements are present. The newsworthiness of a photograph, like that of an event, depends on the strength of intensity of the news element it contains.

Nearly all news photography is classified into two categories: **spot** and **feature news**. This applies to sports as well as any other type of newsworthy activity. Since the spot news photograph achieves a dramatic quality, the unrehearsed action is obvious to the reader. The feature photograph, on the other hand, consists of elements that allow it to tell its story with a brief cutline, or on many occasions, without a cutline.

### **Spot News**

In covering unrehearsed action, control over the kind of photograph you will get is somewhat limited by the situation. For example, in shooting a boxing match, you work at top speed and usually under great pressure. You record developments as they occur with little regard for the control of the men in the ring. Your ingenuity and alert observations will have to be called upon to ensure any technical quality at all. In shooting well-known personalities, you should photograph them doing something. A photograph without action, regardless of the prominence of the personality, is not in itself a storytelling photograph. The successful and usable news photograph has action and impact (fig. 12-2) and



Master Sgt. Don Southerland, USAF

**Figure 12-3.—Award-winning feature photograph.**

immediately draws the reader's attention either to the outline or to the accompanying story.

### Feature News

The purpose of the photo feature is to tell a story about a given subject, selected and planned by the photojournalist, using real people or real things, in real or believable settings. As the photojournalist, you arrange everything to appear as if the story were actually happening; you will have full control over composition, posing, arrangement and expressions of the subject. An example of an award-winning feature photograph is shown in figure 12-3. You should create a lighting effect that establishes mood or realism in your photograph, and select the precise camera angle needed to give emphasis to your photographs.

In shooting the feature story, you are rarely hurried and there are opportunities to change your setups if you are not entirely satisfied. You also may take time to exercise your technical know-how (in processing

control) to produce a photograph of the highest quality. An additional advantage of feature photography is that you may “cover” yourself by taking additional photographs; the straight news photographers afforded little more than a split second for the quick “grab” shot.

### COVERAGE PLANNING

Planning is essential to good news photography. When you are aware of the subject or event you want to portray, plan the photographic coverage so the story may be told through photographs alone, if necessary. The photographs must have imagination and a professional news touch if the results are to be acceptable to the news media.

Strive for simplicity, interjecting the human element into your photographs. Create impressions, use people and always remember that it is people and what they do in everyday life that make news.

Keep the following tips in mind when you plan coverage of news events:



Tony Giberson  
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**Figure 12-4.—“Posed” photographs should appear as if the action were spontaneous.**

- Shoot only when you have in mind the type of photograph you intend to take.
- Keep the photographs from looking posed. Posed photographs are permissible and for best results, it is often necessary for subjects to pose, but this fact should not be discernible in the finished photograph (fig. 12-4).
- Set the stage, place the props for dramatic effect and tell the people what to do and how to look. As we emphasized in Chapter 11, you must be in charge when directing photographic subjects.
- Resist the temptation to ask the photographic subject(s) to “hold for one more.” Most people will do almost anything required for the first take; thereafter, they lose interest quickly in cooperating with the project, and the photograph ultimately suffers. However, if you

feel that for some technical reason you did not get the photograph the first time, do not hesitate to speak up and ask for another shot. Remember, you were sent on the assignment to get pictures, and this is what you are expected to deliver.

- Photograph the faces that fit the emotion. A smile or pleasant expression does not show a lack of dignity; it shows that Navy men and women also have fun.
- Move in on your subject and make your photographs show the desired action. Seldom, if ever, will you be concerned with sweeping panoramas, unless they tell the story you want told.
- Learn as much as you can of the event, the shooting locale and the principles involved before you leave the public affairs office.

### Identification

Always record sufficient information so you may properly identify and prepare cutlines for your photograph upon returning to your office. Using a notebook or caption log to record cutline information was covered in Chapter 9. Additionally, you may have an assistant jot down the information or tape record it as you go along.

### Shooting Script

Some professional photojournalists plan their shooting with great care, including a complete shooting schedule or script. You should study the script before the assignment and commit it to memory, rather than checking it shot by shot at the scene. Often, you may have to depart from your script when shooting at the scene. You must stay one jump ahead of the action, and when the unexpected occurs, be prepared to make a change — remembering your story angle and objectives.

A good script is usually divided into two parts. The first part is concerned with the general idea of the picture story. All pertinent information, such as names, places, times and contacts are listed in this part. The second part lists the picture ideas and the information pertinent to each shot.

**PART ONE.**— The research of a photo feature theme is of the utmost importance to the success of any picture story. A firm idea of what is going to be shot and the approach that will be taken is needed before shooting

can begin. Therefore, in part one of the shooting script, you should complete the following sections:

- **Who**— The name of the individual or subject that will be photographed. The job, title and duty responsibilities of the subject should be included, if applicable.
- **What**— The exact nature of what the subject will be doing in support of the overall theme of the photo feature.
- **When**— The time and date the subject will be photographed. Make sure the subject will be available at the time specified
- **Where**— The exact location or locations where the photography will take place. Make sure the specific area will be available at the time indicated.
- **Why**— Why will this photo feature visually interest your audience? State the reason(s) why the subject will appeal to a given audience. (**Planning**— List three to seven picture ideas in order of their visual flow.)
- **How**— List all arrangements that must be made to enable you to carry out the assignment. Include name(s) and telephone number(s) of contact(s) assisting with the event. Also list the photographic equipment (type of camera, lenses and specific lighting accessories) and props you will need.

**PART TWO.**— Part two of the shooting script should contain a well-planned list and description of, and reasons for, the photographs you determined will best represent the story. For example, if you were doing a picture story on the Navy's flight demonstration team, the Blue Angels, one desired photograph might be identified as follows:

#### SHOT 1: LONG SHOT

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Aircraft flying in close formation. Shoot with the operations tower in the foreground, from low angle, for perspective.

**REASON:** To show the reader the precision flying ability of the "Blues" and to identify the location of their performance.

Other planned photographs in the photo feature should be addressed similarly. The following information should be listed for each proposed shot:

- The angle of view (high, low, front, side, back, and etc.)
- The action (implied or actual) expected to take place
- The type of shot (long, medium, close-up or extreme close-up)
- The desired depth of field or point of focus
- Any unusual lighting conditions

Finally, you should storyboard each picture idea to assure a unified picture page with emphasis placed on leading lines, lines of force, framing or rule of thirds. Storyboarding (fig. 12-5) entails sketching out each planned photograph beforehand, giving visual direction to your list of desired shots and numbering the sketches accordingly.

The sketches do not have to be works of art (stick men representing your subjects will suffice), but they should be recognizable as visual descriptions of the planned photographs on your list.

Remember, the shooting script is only a guide for shooting a picture story. With a basic idea of the subject and its importance (accomplished through research), you can better understand the subject and obtain superior results.

### Shooting Script Techniques

A good shooting script should include the following techniques:

- **Change of pace.** During the actual shooting session in covering a particular subject, interest must somehow be maintained in the story. Interest can be retained by having a change of pace or variety in the coverage technique used by the photographer. Static coverage of a subject can be eliminated by first understanding the reason for certain types of pictures to be taken, and second, by keeping these points in mind during the script writing and the actual shooting.
- **Long (perspective) shots.** Taken from a distance or with the aid of a wide-angle lens, long shots show the subject in its entirety, relate it to its surroundings and clarify the relationship of its different components to one another. They are photographs that, at one glance, present many different aspects of a subject that subsequently is further explained in some of the other photographs in the story. This type of photograph

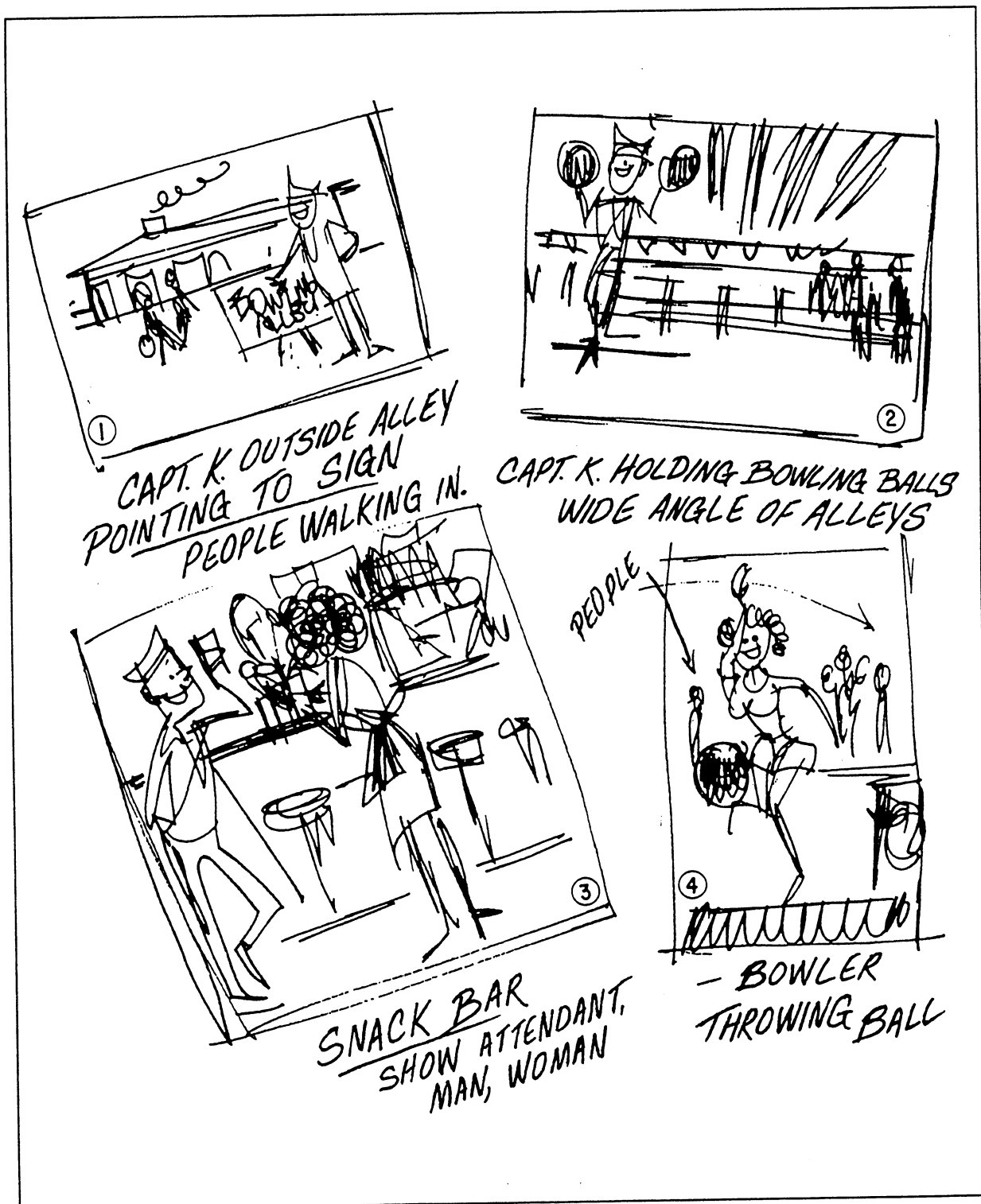


Figure 12-5.—Storyboard.

is best taken from a high vantage point, such as a roof, scaffold or ladder.

**Medium shots.** Medium shots normally comprise the bulk of the photographs that make up the picture story. They correspond to the

impression the eye receives in reality. They are used to show people, objects, things, interiors and action.

- **Close-ups.** Close-ups are explanatory photographs that permit the photographer to show